

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace paragraph [0005] as originally filed, with the amended paragraph as follows:

--Moreover, each of the metal and stud formations taught in the prior art as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 fail to improve stud mechanical strength, nor to enhance electromigration effect. For example, as depicted in the perspective view of a portion of a conventional multi-layer conducting interconnect structure 400 40 shown in Figure 4(B), there is provided four metal lines, 41, 43, 45 and 47, and their corresponding contact vias 42, 44 and 46. Metal line 41 and 45 are parallel to each other, but perpendicular to both metal lines 43 and 47. In this layout, contact vias all are aligned perfectly to the underlying metal wires. As shown in Figure 4(B), the locations in the structure depicted by dotted lines represent that either the contact via metal connects directly with the adjoining metal underlayer, or alternately, the diffusion barrier layer forms the interface between the via and the adjoining metal layer. In this conventional structure 40 shown in Figure 4(B), locations 48 where the formed liner contacts the metal layer always have weak mechanical strength due to the essential thermal mismatch between metal and dielectrics. This failure may be revealed as broken barrier materials, which will eventually degrade the reliability of the circuits.—

Please replace paragraph [0006] as originally filed, with the amended paragraph as follows:

--As a further example, a Figure 5(B) depicts a portion of a conventional multi-layer conducting interconnect structure 50. For example, as depicted in the view of a portion of a conventional multi-layer conducting interconnect structure 50 shown in Figure 5(B), there is provided four metal lines, 51, 53, 55 and 57, and their corresponding contact vias 52, 54 and 56. Metal line 51 and 55 are parallel to each other, but perpendicular to both metal lines 53 and 57. ~~however, in~~ In this conventional embodiment, the vias are misaligned to the underneath metal lines. Thus, as shown in Figure 5(B), vias 52 and 56 are misaligned to the underneath metal lines 51 and 55 respectively as shown in the Figure 5(B). Like the case in Figure 4(B), in Figure 5(B), the locations in the structure depicted by dotted lines represent that either the contact via metal connects directly with the adjoining metal underlayer, or alternately, the diffusion barrier layer forms the interface between the via and the adjoining

metal layer. In this conventional structure 50 shown in Figure 5(B), locations 58 where the formed liner contacts the metal layer always have weakened mechanical strength. --